

Christ In You

2 Corinthians 13:1–14

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Introduction

Today we come to the end of our study in 2 Corinthians. Personally, it has been an important study — both challenging and comforting in equal measure.

The book of 2 Corinthians was written just before Paul's third trip to Corinth. He first went to Corinth in 50 AD during his second missionary journey and stayed there for almost two years. While there, he planted a church that he dearly loved. He left Corinth in 52 AD and spent the next three years in Ephesus, and it is from there that he made his second trip to Corinth.

That second visit took place around 54 AD. Paul had received word that things were not going well. There were factions in the church, sexual immorality, members suing one another, and tremendous confusion about marriage, idolatry, rituals, food, and theology. On hearing this news, Paul wrote the letter we know as 1 Corinthians, and soon after writing it, he traveled to Corinth. The visit did not go well.

False apostles had come to Corinth and preached a different Jesus, a different gospel, and a different spirit. They taught a form of works righteousness that enslaved the church, and they sowed discord between the congregation and Paul. So when Paul arrived during that second visit, instead of being welcomed, he was publicly wronged and humiliated. The false apostles held themselves up as the legitimate, genuine representatives of Jesus — and Paul, they insisted, was not.

Back in Ephesus, Paul wrote another letter to the Corinthians — one we no longer possess — that expressed his love for them while calling them to repentance. Soon after writing it, he had to leave Ephesus, but he did not go directly to Corinth, because he was not yet sure he would be received. He traveled instead to Macedonia, where he waited for word from Titus about the state of the church.

The year is now 56 AD. There in Macedonia, Titus finds him and brings his report: the church has grieved and repented. This news prompts Paul to write 2 Corinthians in a spirit of comfort and thanksgiving. And yet, false apostles and teachers are still influencing the congregation. In these final four chapters, Paul turns his attention to those ongoing, deceptive influences within the church.

One of the issues woven throughout these chapters is the accusation that Paul himself is not legitimate — that he is not a real apostle of Jesus. Paul responds to this criticism by pointing to the presence of Christ in the Corinthians themselves, and to the presence of Christ demonstrated through his own weakness, as the evidence of his apostolic authenticity.

Now, in this final chapter — our passage today — Paul turns the question around entirely. He says, in effect, “It is not you who should be examining me. It is you who should be examining yourselves.” This is the context for the final chapter of 2 Corinthians.

The Evidence of Authenticity

This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them — since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God. — 2 Corinthians 13:1–4

Christ is in you. And in our weakness, Christ is in us. This summarizes much of what Paul has been arguing throughout this letter. Looking back to chapter 3, Paul speaks of Christ in the Corinthians as his letter of recommendation from them. And chapter 4 is just one of the places where he develops the theme of God’s power displayed through human weakness:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. — 2 Corinthians 4:7

Paul has submitted himself to their examination. Now he asks them to examine themselves.

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. — 2 Corinthians 13:5–6

That phrase “fail to meet the test” is a single word in Greek: *δόκιμοί*. It is a word used to denote something as false, counterfeit, unacceptable, or unqualified — something that is inauthentic, not genuine.

Paul has been accused of being just that: not a genuine apostle. And so he turns the question back upon the church. Are you really a follower of Jesus, or are you faking it? Is your faith genuine? Is Christ truly present in you? Examine yourselves.

The Necessity of Self-Examination

Self-examination is something Christians should practice regularly. Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon on the necessity of self-examination in which he argued that we should examine ourselves because sin not only corrupts our behavior — it corrupts our ability to recognize our behavior as sinful. In that sermon, he poses seventy-six questions to guide the examination. The first three give a sense of the whole:

Do I manifest an attitude of openness toward God that would invite him to “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts”? (Psalm 139:23–24)

Is my heart eager to learn of “any wicked way” in me?

Are my motives for self-examination correct — that I might be led “in the way everlasting”?

All seventy-six questions are attached to this manuscript, and I commend them to you. As helpful as they are, however, I believe a person can examine themselves — can genuinely test whether they are in the faith, whether Christ is in them — with just three questions.

Three Questions of Self-Examination

Question One: Do You Confess Jesus Christ as Your Lord and Savior?

By “confess,” I mean what Paul means in Romans 10:9:

Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. — Romans 10:9

Confession is more than intellectual agreement. It is more than knowing facts. To confess Jesus involves both the mind and the heart: one must know who Jesus is and what he has done, and one must have a willful desire to follow him.

Who is Jesus? He is Lord. That word carries two layers of meaning. It can render the Hebrew *Adonai* — the one who holds all authority, the King of Kings. And it can also render *Yahweh*,

the very covenant name of God himself. To confess Jesus as Lord is therefore to confess and proclaim him as both Sovereign and God.

And what did Jesus do? The phrase “God raised him from the dead” is a kind of shorthand for the complete work of Christ — his atoning, substitutionary death upon the cross for you and for me, and his resurrection from the grave three days later. By his death and resurrection, sin is atoned for and death is defeated.

Those who confess Jesus — who he is and what he has done — will be saved.

So the first question: Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? If you cannot say yes to that question, you have failed the test. And if you have failed, by the grace of God, I invite you to confess him today.

Question Two: In Your Need, Do You Trust Jesus?

Trusting Jesus is the natural and logical outflow of one’s confession. If Jesus is truly my Lord and Savior, then he must also be the one upon whom I depend. The reason I have phrased the question in terms of need is that what you do with your need reveals what you trust.

If I need to sit down, I look for a chair I trust will hold my weight. If I am thirsty, I drink from a source I trust will not make me sick. If I am discouraged, I turn to something I trust will help — maybe I call a friend, or perhaps I eat a hamburger and French fries. The point is this: our needs reveal our trusts. What we turn to, depend upon, and expect to sustain us reveals where our faith is actually resting.

Some of our needs are physical, and God provides physical things to meet them — a chair, food, friends. These are good gifts, and we should receive them with thanksgiving. But there are deeper needs that no physical possession or earthly pleasure can satisfy: the need to be loved, known, and accepted; the need to know that our lives matter; the need to be secure, free from guilt and condemnation; the need for peace and genuine joy.

These are real needs. The problem is not that we have them — God created us with a need for love, belonging, purpose, security, and hope. The problem is that we so often turn to created things, or to our own efforts, and ask them to do what only Christ can do. To meet the need for acceptance, many conform to the expectations of others. To feel significant, many chase position, influence, or recognition. To feel secure, many accumulate money, possessions, or control. To find peace, people escape into entertainment, food, alcohol, drugs, or endless distraction. To be free from guilt and condemnation, many justify themselves, blame others, or hide what they have done.

Where you go to satisfy those deep needs of the soul reveals who or what you actually trust.

Jesus says in John 6:35:

I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. — John 6:35

He himself is the gift given to satisfy the deep needs of the soul. In Christ, we are fully known, completely loved, accepted by grace, adopted into the family of God, forgiven, and given eternal meaning and purpose. He is the one who has given himself to meet what nothing else can meet. And it is through trusting him that the needs of the soul find their satisfaction in him.

So the question again: In your need, do you trust Jesus? Do you take the deepest needs of your soul to him? Do you trust that who he is, what he has done, what he has promised, and what he provides are sufficient for you?

Question Three: Is Christ in You?

This is the most difficult question to ask, because it is the one most frequently misunderstood and most easily abused. But I am asking it because it is the question Paul himself is asking — it is what he is pressing toward. He asks it directly in verse 5:

Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — 2 Corinthians 13:5

This is a vital question, because Christ in you is the gospel promise. The gospel is more than forgiveness — which we have. It is more than eternal life — which we have. It is Christ in you. Fellowship with God, enjoying him, being in him and he in us — that is what redemption is about. That is what reconciliation is about. That is what forgiveness makes possible and the righteousness of Christ provides. And Christ in you takes place, literally and historically, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church — an outpouring that was not a one-time event in Acts 2, but one that continues upon every person who confesses Jesus as Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:3).

The reason this question is difficult for self-examination is that just as the false apostles in Paul's day pointed to sinless perfection, ecstatic spiritual experiences, spectacular gifts, or impressive religious résumés as the evidence of Christ's presence, many false teachers today do the same. It is not that spiritual experiences, gifts, or remarkable works never occur. It is that Paul does not make such things the primary evidence we are to examine.

The entire argument of 2 Corinthians can be summarized in a single line. People accused Paul of being inauthentic — not a true apostle, not a genuine follower of Jesus. And his response was never to point to all the churches he planted, all the people he led to the Lord, or the miracles he performed — though he does mention those things in chapter 12. Instead, he says simply: "You know Christ is in me because he comes out of me when I am broken. When I am suffering, weak, and pressed — that is when you see Christ in me. That is why I boast in my

weakness.” Paul’s weakness did not disprove the presence of Christ; it became the very setting in which the power of Christ was revealed.

Think of a tube of toothpaste. When you squeeze it, what comes out? Toothpaste — because that is what is inside. Or imagine a clay jar filled with a powerful perfume. When the jar breaks, the fragrance is released and spreads throughout the room. In the same way, if Christ is in you, then when you are squeezed or broken, what comes out of you is increasingly Christ. Not always perfectly. But genuinely.

In those times when you are pressed, disappointed, discouraged, or weak: Christ may come out of you through your words, as you speak truth, grace, and blessing. He may come out of you through your actions, as you continue to love, serve, and forgive. Christ may come out of you through your repentance, as you stop defending your sin and confess it honestly. He may come out through your dependence, as you admit you do not have the strength or wisdom you need. He may come out through your endurance, your patience, your kindness, and your hope.

How do you know if Christ is in you? You will recognize him in you and working through you precisely during those times you need him most.

When the Question Feels Like a Verdict

Perhaps as you sit with that third question, a particular moment comes to mind — maybe from this past week, maybe even from this morning as you were getting ready for church — a moment when you were pressed, and what came out was not Christ. It was fear. It was bitterness. It was anger, or despair. If that is you, then Question Three may feel less like an invitation and more like a verdict.

If so, follow along as we continue reading:

But we pray to God that you may not do wrong — not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down. — 2 Corinthians 13:7–10

The good that Paul wants for them is described at the close of chapter 12: he is calling those living in sin to repent. His point here is simply that his desire is not that they recognize his own authenticity, but that they become authentic followers of Jesus. “If you are doing what is right,”

Paul is saying, “I do not care if you think of me as a fake. Because this is not about me.” If his weakness makes them strong, he is glad.

But notice what Paul acknowledges in verse 7: it is entirely possible for a genuine believer — even a man like Paul — to appear to have failed the test. He is speaking there of how the Corinthians regard him. And yet Paul knew from his own experience what it was to struggle painfully between the Christ he loved and the sin that still remained in him. In Romans 7, he describes himself as a wretched man in whom sin continues to dwell:

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. — Romans 7:21

There are times when we are pressed and what comes out is not Christ. So what then? If I lose my temper when someone wrongs me, does that mean Christ is not in me? If I grow angry at God in the middle of suffering, does that mean Christ is not in me?

I do not think so.

Sometimes the evidence of Christ in you is not what flows out on your worst days and worst failures. Sometimes the evidence is that even on your worst days, Christ does not leave you. You are never left alone. Through his Spirit, he continues to call you back to himself. That is how I know Christ is in me — not that I never fall, but that he does not allow me to remain where I fall. By Christ in you, by his Spirit, he convicts, calls to repentance, restores, and draws you back to himself.

That is how we can know Christ is in us.

Closing Benediction

The book of 2 Corinthians ends with a final instruction and blessing to the church:

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. — 2 Corinthians 13:11–14

Amen.

Jonathan Edwards’ Questions for Self-Examination 1. Do I manifest an attitude of openness toward God that would invite him to “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know

my thoughts”? (Psalm 139:23-24) 2. Is my heart eager to learn of “any wicked way” in me? 3. Are my motives for self-examination correct—that I might be led “in the way everlasting”? 4. Is it important for me to know whether or not I live in a state of sin? 5. Do I live in the gratification of some lust, either in thought or in deed? 6. Do I live in the omission of some known duty? 7. Am I sinning against the light of my conscience in some way, by going on in known sins? 8. Have I been careful, watchful, and diligent in observing myself for evidence of sin in commission or omission? 9. Have I lived in some way which is inconsistent with my Christian profession, and is not suitable for disciples and followers of Jesus? 10. Have I allowed myself to become blinded by the deceitful nature of habitually gratified sin? 11. Have I invented ways of justifying my sinful practices, calling them by more virtuous titles, or rationalizing them in any way? 12. Do I regularly ask friends and loved ones to show me the faults that I cannot see in myself? 13. Do I overlook some sin in my life because it has become customary to me? 14. Do I allow myself to commit some sin because it is not widely condemned among my fellow-man, or because I see it done by my peers? 15. Am I selective in my obedience? Do I pick and choose which parts of my duty I will perform, neglecting those which are more distasteful to me? 16. Do I set aside time regularly to read and meditate on the Word of God? 17. Have I taken the utmost care to know myself, so that I may compare my thoughts, words, and deeds with the rule of holy Scripture? In what ways does my life agree (or disagree) with what Scripture teaches? 18. Am I doing anything which might be considered a ‘grey area’; things that godly brethren would view as a way of sin? When I look upon this with the utmost strictness, can I see any sin in it? 19. Do I live in any way that I might regret when I lie upon my death-bed? Is there anything I am doing that I would not want to be caught doing if Christ were to return that moment, or I should be taken out of this world and into eternity? 20. Do I consider carefully what others (both friends and foes) say of me and to me, to discover whether I might be living in any way of sin? 21. When I see faults in others, do I make use of the opportunity to examine myself, to see if there is the same fault in me? 22. When I see another who is blind to his own sin, do I look to see if I am also blind to this same sin? 23. Do I live in some way which profanes the Sabbath-day? 24. Do I profane the Sabbath-day by conducting avoidable worldly business? 25. Do I engage in speech which is not fitting for the Lord’s Day? 26. Do I squander the opportunity afforded me to seek God and salvation in greater measure, because of vain, earthly pursuits I am accustomed to on this day? 27. Do I slight the Sabbath by often coming late to church? 28. Do I avoid participation in the ordinances of my church for some reason? 29. Do I participate in worship by singing with heart and voice? (John 4:23-24; cf. Matthew 15:8) 30. Am I frequently distracted during church, allowing my mind to wander freely? 31. Do I spurn the message of God’s herald by allowing myself to sleep in church? 32. Am I guilty of allowing scandals to exist within the body of Christ? 33. Do I harbour and maintain a sin which is dear to me, hiding it from the eyes of the world and ignoring conscience? (Numbers 32:23; Hebrews 4:13) 34. Do I neglect the duty of regular, private, prayerful reading of the Word of God? 35. Do I gratify some sensual lust, either openly, or by relishing the thought of it in my mind? Do I somehow cultivate an appetite for carnal things? 36. Do I allow myself to indulge in sinful anger? 37. Do

I live in hatred or ill will towards my neighbour? Do I rejoice at his misfortune? 38. Do I live in envy of my neighbour's prosperity, wealth, or honour among men? 39. Do I cheat and defraud those with whom I deal? 40. Am I trustworthy, dependable, and truthful? 41. Do I pay the debts I owe in a timely fashion? 42. Do I oppress anyone? 43. Do I take advantage another's necessity as an opportunity for selfish gain? 44. Am I always honest when buying and selling goods and services? 45. Have I left any wrong unrepaired, or failed to reconcile a relationship which has been damaged? (Matthew 5:23-24) 46. Do I show the love of Christ by helping my neighbour in his time of need? 47. Do I take necessary steps to reprove my brother who is in sin, first privately, then openly, in accordance with Scripture? (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1) 48. Do I entertain the company of lewd and immoral persons? 49. Do I speak evil of others in gossip, slander, or flattery, or entertain such speech in conversations with others? 50. Do I accept the ill report of another concerning my neighbour, without going to my neighbour to confirm the truthfulness of the report being circulated about him, and give him an opportunity to learn of it and vindicate his good name? 51. Do I speak evil by lewd talk and coarse jesting, or entertain such speech in conversations with others? (Ephesians 4:29) 52. Am I two-faced and disingenuous in my conversations with parties who are in disagreement over some issue? 53. Am I strictly truthful in my conversations with others? Do I allow myself to shade the truth or exaggerate? 54. Do I behave in any manner which does not exemplify Christ among the members of my household? 55. Do I love the members of my household to a degree commensurate with their near relation to me? 56. Have I caused or furthered any contention among my familial relationships? 57. Am I honoring the marriage covenant by cultivating my relationship with my spouse? 58. Have I sought to perform all those duties to which Scripture calls me, by humbly serving my spouse with deliberate diligence? 59. Do I maintain any bitterness toward my spouse, even if it seems justified? 60. Am I easily irritated with my spouse or other family members? 61. Do I study my spouse so that I may suit myself toward her needs, temperament, and comfort? Or do I live to please myself first? 62. Do I govern my wife imperiously, in an unbiblical authoritarian manner? 63. Do I neglect the regular and diligent instruction of my children, overlooking this as a duty of the utmost importance? 64. Is my discipline of my children fair, consistent, and effective? Does it combine the elements of correction and instruction? Is it done in a loving manner? 65. Do I undermine my spouse's attempts to discipline my children in any way? 66. If a child, do I honor my parents by obeying them without protest? Do I accept their counsels and reproofs willingly? Do I harbor a rebellious attitude toward them? 67. If a child, do I despise my parents for their weaknesses and shortcomings? 68. Do I honor my parents in their old age? 69. Does my conscience accuse me that I am living in any way of sin? 70. Do I bear fruits which are consistent with a genuine profession of faith? 71. Is grace flourishing in my soul? Is it growing and strong, or languishing? 72. Has some habitual sin in my life paved the way for a greater sin? 73. Is some habitual sin causing me to live in a spiritually darkened state, with cold affections toward Christ, in which I am grieving the Holy Spirit and inviting desertion by God? 74. If I am in a doubting condition, could it be caused by some sin I have not forsaken? 75. If I am in adverse

circumstances, could some sin be the cause of it? 76. If I fear suffering, illness, or death, could it be caused by some habitual sin that I have not forsaken?

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